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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to empirically investigate the specific suggestion that, without help, children who play the scapegoat role in the alcoholic family may later end up in prison. Family roles assumed by incarcerated and non-incarcerated male and female Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs) were compared. The incarcerated subjects were drawn from a correctional-vocational training center and the non-incarcerated subjects were taken from Alcoholics Anonymous and ACOA groups. Participants (N=141), ranging in age from 18 to 55 years, completed the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test to determine eligibility for the study and the Family Relations Inventory to measure the respondent's role in the family. A two-way analysis of variance was computed; the results comparing mean differences in roles played by male and female incarcerated and non-incarcerated respondents showed no significant differences. Of the 77 incarcerated subjects, only 16% reported having played the scapegoat role; 58% reported having played the hero role while growing up. Of the non-incacerated group, 6% reported having played the scapegoat role, and 61% reported having played the hero role. Of the incarcerated group, 42% reported having two alcoholic parents, compared to 23% of the non-incarcerated group. The benefit of having one non-alcoholic parent is an area which requires further study. (Author/NB)

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Adult Children of Alcoholics and Their Family Roles: A Comparison of Incarcerated and Non-Incarcerated Adult Children of Alcoholics

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ABSTRACT

Comparison of family roles assumed by incarcerated and non-incarcerated male and female ACA's was the focus of this research. The incarcerated group was taken from a Correctional-Vocational Training Center (KCVTC), and the non-incarcerated group was taken from AL-ANON and ACA groups. Participants (n-141), ranging in age from 18 to 55 years, completed The Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST) and the Family Relations Inventory (FRI). The CAST was used to determine eligibility for the study. The FRI measured the participant's role in the family. A two-way analysis of variance was computed to test the hypotheses that there would be no significant role differences between incarcerated and non-incarcerated ACA's, and that there would be no significant role differences between male and female ACA's. Results showed no significant role differences between incarcerated and non-incarcerated ACA's and no significant role differences between male and female ACA's.

Introduction

Alcoholism has been an area of social concern for decades, and huge sums of money have been spent in attempts to reform the alcoholic. In the past, people believed that alcoholism affected only the drinker and that the family suffered no devastating effects (Priest, 1985). As a result of this belief, "the children of alcoholics have been variously described as the 'forgotten children', 'a hidden tragedy', the 'unseen casualties' and a 'neglected problem'..." (Wilson, 1982).

"One out of three American adults--an estimated 56 million Americans--say that alcohol abuse has brought trouble to their families" (Mosher, 1988). When one member of a family is an alcoholic, the entire family suffers (Stark, 1987). According to Corazzini, Williams and Harris (1987), Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA's) can not be ignored any longer, and it is up to the mental health field to understand the issues and the needs of ACA's in order to provide the most effective treatment possible.

One major issue for ACA's is growing up in a very unstable household (Deutsch, 1982). Writers in this area explain that in a chemically dependent family, each family member adopts roles to mediate the stresses of being reared in an unpredictable alcoholic household (Miller & Ripper, 1988; Ackerman, 1987; Wilson, 1982; Black, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981). According to McElligatt (1986), "Roles become patterns carried into adulthood; therein lies the trap. The old styles of copying that were appropriate defensive strategies in the alcoholic family later interfere with successful adjustment to becoming an adult".

In order to survive the rules of the alcoholic family system, the individual members of the system often adapt by taking on various roles. The roles serve to divert attention from the alcoholic, and to focus on the behavior of the family member who is playing the role. The creation of roles is a direct result of family

members trying to cope with the disease of alcoholism (Kritsberg, 1986). Such roles may include being a hero, a scapegoat, a lost child, or a mascot.

Hero

The family hero is usually the oldest child. The hero is the success story who brings hope and esteem to the family. Heroes excel in school and outside activities. They are perfectionistic, controlling, and take on responsibilities beyond their years. Heroes are supercopers who need success and admiration (Miller & Ripper, 1988; Kritsberg, 1986; McElligatt, 1986; Lawson, Peterson, & Lawson, 1983; Deutsch, 1982; Black, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981).

Scapegoat

Although any child can play any role, scapegoats are often the second child and take an opposing role. Scapegoats seek attention by acting out and expressing the family's anger and frustration. Scapegoats divert attention from the alcoholic. Sometimes the family unites to "save" this child (Miller & Ripper, 1988; Kritsberg, 1986; McElligatt, 1986; Lawson, Peterson, & Lawson, 1983; Deutsch, 1982; Black, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981). The child who plays the scapegoat role has a good chance of winding up in prison if help is not received (Wegscheider, 1981).

Lost Child

This is often the middle child, with no role at all. The lost child is a loner. They are quiet, isolated, cope by avoiding everything and everyone. This child blends into the "woodwork" and never enters into the family's burdens (Miller & Ripper, 1988; Kritsberg, 1986; McElligatt, 1986; Lawson, Peterson, & Lawson, 1983; Deutsch, 1982; Black, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981).

Mascot

The mascot is the baby of the family. This child keeps the family happy and dispels tension. The mascot clowns, manipulates, and seeks everyone's attention. The job of the other family members is to protect and appease the mascot (Miller &

Ripper, 1988; Kritsberg, 1986; McElligatt, 1986; Lawson, Peterson, & Lawson, 1983; Deutsch, 1982; Black, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981).

Adult Children of Alcoholics as a population are at great risk for a variety of lifelong difficulties (Deutsch, 1982). Experts in the field of ACA's agree that without help, the hero could become a workaholic, feel responsible for everyone and marry a dependent; the scapegoat may become a troublemaker at work or end up in prison; the lost child can have little zest for life and may die at an early age; the mascot can be a compulsive clown, remain immature and develop ulcers because they cannot handle stress (Wegscheider, 1981).

Although much of a descriptive nature has been written about ACA's usually based on case study, very little in the way of empirical research has been conducted to validate existing premises. The present study is, in part, an empirical investigation of the specific suggestion that, without help, children who play the scapegoat role in the alcoholic family may later end in prison.

The study compared family roles of incarcerated male and female ACAs to a comparison group of ACA's who were involved in AL-ANON and/or ACA groups. The null hypotheses were (a) that there would be no significant difference in mean score for type of role played between incarcerated and non-incarcerated ACAs, and (b) that there would be no significant difference in mean scores between women and men on the measure of the type of role which they played.

Method

Subjects

The incarcerated sample was drawn from a minimum security correctional facility in the mid-west. The sample consisted of 44 women and 33 men, ranging from 18 years to 55 years of age. The mean age was 33 years for the male inmates and 31 years for the female inmates.

The non-incarcerated sample was drawn from the members of AL-ANON and ACA groups in a midwestern community. The sample consisted of 31 women and 33 men, ranging from 18 years of age to 51 years of age. The mean age was 30 years for the female AL-ANON/ACA subjects and 29 years for the male AL-ANON/ACA subjects.

Subjects were asked for additional descriptive data about themselves. The information obtained was age, sex, marital status, education, birth order, number of people in the family, family members with a drinking problem, people who resided in the household while respondents were growing up, and the respondent's primary confidant. These data are presented in Table I.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As Table I shows, some differences existed between the four groups. The incarcerated group included a larger proportion of minorities, divorced persons, and persons with a high school education than did the nonincarcerated groups. In terms of ethnic composition, there were fewer black women represented in the female non-incarcerated group. There were no Asian or Pacific Islanders in the incarcerated group, while there were no American Indians or Alaskan natives represented in the non-incarcerated group.

The largest number of divorced individuals were found in the female incarcerated group. The marital status categories for the remaining groups were comparable.

Gender differences in educational status were found between groups. More persons in the incarcerated group than in the non-incarcerated group did not complete high school. More non-incarcerated individuals had college or professional training beyond college while more incarcerated individuals were trade school graduates.

In answering the question concerning which members of their family had drinking or drug problems, individuals marked as many categories as applied. Although parents, self, spouse and siblings were most frequently identified, it is clear that many other family members were also addicted.

In addition to identifying family members with drinking or drug problems, it was also important to determine with whom the subjects resided as children. Table I shows a largely traditional picture with most subjects growing up in a family consisting of mother, father and siblings. The incarcerated group appears to have resided in more extended families than the non-incarcerated group. This may be due, in part, to the higher black representation in this group, given that for the black sub-culture the extended family is more common.

Instruments

The Family Relations Inventory (FRI) is a 60 item inventory, requiring responses on a five-point Likert Scale. The Likert Scale responses consisted of: (1) Always, (2) Almost Always, (3) Sometimes, (4) Almost Never, and (5) Never. The 60 items were evenly divided among the four family roles, so that fifteen questions pertained to each role. The questions utilized in the inventory came from the most common characteristics mentioned about each family role in the literature. Two examples for the hero role were "I made good grades in school" and "I would listen to my family's problems." Two examples of questions applying to the scapegoat role were "I did what society said was wrong" and "I believed I was bad." For the mascot role, two examples were "I was the class comedian" and "I got attention when I acted cute." Two examples of questions tapping the lost child role were "I spent as much time away from home as possible" and "I did not fit into my family."

Because to date there is no published inventory which assesses family roles the FRI was specifically designed for this study. Internal consistency was determined by using the Cronbach Alpha Reliability test. The overall alpha for the FRI was .85.

Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST)

To eliminate non-ACA's from the study, the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST) was administered. The CAST has 30 items with a "yes/no" response format. It is scored on a point system with one point given for each "yes" response. The items measure attitudes toward parental drinking (i.e., "Did you ever resent a parent's drinking?") and problems which arose because of the drinking (i.e., "Has a parent ever yelled at or hit you or other family members when drinking?"). The CAST takes approximately five to seven minutes to complete.

A reliability coefficient of .98 was computed using the Spearman-Brown split-half (odd vs. even) reliability test. The validity of this test was .78. The cutoff score of six or more "Yes" answers identifies children of alcoholics (Jones, 1983).

Procedure

After receiving permission from prison officials, data were collected, with the assistance of the prison counselor, during two inmate meetings. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was insured. Data were collected from the non-incarcerated individuals during the course of five Al-Anon or ACOA meetings. Participation was also voluntary. All individuals were administered the demographic profile, CAST and FRI. It took approximately 25 minutes to complete the inventories.

Results

A two-way repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for mean differences in FRI scores which measured in the degree to which the family roles were played by female and male incarcerated and non-incarcerated participants. Since the roles played in the family are not always permanent, a child, at one time or another, may play different roles. For this reason, each subject has 4 scores, one for each role. The lower the score the more the subject identified with

the role. Fifteen was the lowest possible score and 75 was the highest possible score. Table 2 summarizes the results of the analyses for the four roles.

The results of the analysis indicated no significant differences in mean scores between the incarcerated and non-incarcerated groups in the roles they played while growing up [$F(1,137) = 3.37, 1.89, .30, .39$, NS]. No statistically significant differences in mean scores were found between males and females $F(1,137) = 3.35, .67, 2.07, .69$, NS], and no statistically significant interaction was found between subjects' setting (incarcerated vs non-incarcerated) and sex [$F(1,137) = .24, .00, 3.56, .46$, NS]. Table 3 reports the groups means.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

The results of the two-way ANOVA comparing mean differences in roles played between male and female incarcerated and non-incarcerated ACA's, showed no significant differences. The null hypotheses failed to be rejected.

Persons who work with ACAs have argued that the children who play the scapegoat role have a good chance of going to prison if they do not receive help (Wegscheider, 1981). The results of the present study would seem to refute Wegscheider's conclusions. Of the 77 subject's who were incarcerated, only 16 percent reported that the scapegoat role was the predominant role they played while growing up. The majority (58 percent) reported that the hero role was their predominant childhood role. Of the non-incarcerated group, six percent played the

scapegoat role, and 61 percent played the hero role. This difference in frequency of role assumption is not a significant one, and it is not in the direction one would predict from the writings of the experts in the field.

Some children from alcoholic homes have trouble coping and some do not. The reason some children are better adjusted in adulthood than others depends on many interwoven and complicated factors. Stark (1987) contends that the severity of the parent's drinking, the amount of marital conflict, whether there are siblings or not, the sex of the alcoholic parent, the sex of the child, and the strength of the relationship between child and nonalcoholic parent can all make a difference.

The relationship between child and nonalcoholic parent may help to alleviate some of the problems the adult child may have as a result of having an alcoholic parent. Of the incarcerated group, 42 percent reported having two alcoholic parents almost twice as many as the non-incarcerated group. Twenty-three percent of the non-incarcerated group reported both parents as alcoholic. The benefit of having one non-alcoholic parent is an area which demands further study.

Much of the literature on adult children and the generalities drawn about adult children are based on the white, middle class society. The results of the present study suggest that the literature based on this group of adults may not apply to members of minority groups. In the present study, 34 percent of the non-incarcerated group and 48 percent of the incarcerated group were not Caucasian. The ethnicity of six percent of the incarcerated group was not reported.

Economic status of the two groups is not known, however higher education is usually associated with higher economic status or at least the potential for a higher economic status. Of the subjects in the incarcerated group, 34 percent indicated they did not finish high school, while only six percent of the non-incarcerated group indicated they did not complete high school. There are ethnic differences, and there may be economic differences between the incarcerated and non-incarcerated

groups. As stated earlier, most of the conclusions drawn about ACA's in the literature are based on white, middle class ACA's. In most societies, the further away a family is from the average or the norm in the society, the more other societal issues will impact on the family (Ackerman, 1987).

While not discounting the experts on ACA's, nor disagreeing with the definitions of family roles, the generalization about the consequences of growing up in a family based on one segment of society may not be accurate for all parts of society. When people are placed into a mold in which they do not fit, many of their needs maybe overlooked and ignored. This can lead to further problems for the ACA who needs and wants help.

Although all ACA's share the common bond of having at least one alcoholic parent, it is important to understand that each adult child is unique, not only in the experiences that he or she has had but also in the degree to which these unique experiences contribute to who the adult child becomes (Ackerman, 1987). Anyone involved with ACA's needs to keep in mind that each person is an individual and the impact of alcoholism in the family will likely effect each person differently.

In the present study, ACA's who ended up in prison did not play the scapegoat role more often than the non-incarcerated ACA's who reported that they assumed this role. The role played while growing up may not be the significant factor some researchers believe it is. Rather, it may have been a combination of factors which led individuals who shared a common family situation to different adult circumstances. What Ackerman (1987) asserts is that offsetting factors can occur at any time in the ACA's life and that these factors can help the ACA. Counseling that provides ACAs an opportunity to understand the role(s) they played as children maybe an offsetting factor. Educational opportunities are a second example of positive offsetting factors that may help to change the lives of incarcerated ACOAs.

Table 1
Summary of Demographic Information for the Samples of Incarcerated and Non-Incarcerated ACOAs.

	FI		MI		FF		MF	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Race								
Asian or Pacific Islanders	.0	0	.0	0	.03	1	.03	1
Am. Indian or Alaskan Native	.07	3	.06	2	.0	0	.0	0
Black	.32	14	.42	14	.16	5	.39	13
Hispanic	.05	2	.06	2	.06	2	.0	0
Caucasian	.50	22	.39	13	.74	23	.58	19
Other	.07	3	.06	2	.0	0	.0	0
Marital Status								
Single	.26	11	.27	9	.48	15	.55	18
Separated	.05	2	.12	4	.10	3	.09	3
Divorced	.40	17	.15	5	.06	2	.15	5
Widowed	.05	2	.06	2	.06	2	.0	0
Married	.24	10	.39	13	.29	9	.21	7
Education								
Did not complete high school	.30	13	.39	13	.03	1	.09	3
High school graduate	.14	6	.18	6	.10	3	.12	4
Some college	.23	10	.18	6	.13	4	.33	11
Junior college graduate	.0	0	.0	0	.10	3	.0	0
Trade school graduate	.25	11	.18	6	.13	4	.18	6
College graduate	.07	3	.06	2	.26	8	.15	5
Professional training beyond college	.02	1	.0	0	.26	8	.12	4
While growing up did you have someone you confided in?								
Yes	.48	21	.48	16	.35	11	.48	16
No	.52	23	.52	17	.65	20	.52	17

Table 1 (continued)

	FI n	MI n	FF n	MF n
Family members with a drinking and/or drug problem (more than one marked)				
Father	36	23	23	21
Mother	15	17	10	11
Sibling	11	8	12	5
Spouse	13	8	5	3
Self	22	12	11	6
Stepmother	1	0	4	0
Stepfather	5	4	4	3
Uncle	13	9	8	7
Grandmother	4	4	5	2
Grandfather	10	4	9	3
Aunt	13	7	4	3
Cousin	14	8	10	8
Child	3	1	1	1
Other	1	0	1	0
People with whom you primarily lived as a child (more than one marked)				
Father	23	15	21	24
Mother	39	28	29	33
Stepmother	0	0	1	1
Stepfather	7	4	4	6
Sibling	15	13	24	18
Aunt	4	2	1	1
Uncle	5	3	1	1
Grandmother	8	9	3	6
Grandfather	5	6	2	2
Cousin	3	3	1	1
Other	2	0	1	0

FI = Female Incarcerated
MI = Male Incarcerated
FF = Female Non-Incarcerated
MF = Male Non-Incarcerated

Table 2

Summary of Two-Way Analysis of Variance Comparison Among Incarcerated and Non-Incarcerated Females and Males Assuming Different Family Roles by Setting by Sex

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	Prob
Role					
Hero	1,137	153.47	153.47	3.37	.07
Scapegoat	1,137	161.74	161.74	1.89	.17
Lost Child	1,137	31.26	31.26	.31	.58
Mascot	1,137	18.35	18.35	.39	.53
Sex					
Hero	1,137	152.37	152.37	3.35	.07
Scapegoat	1,137	57.15	57.15	.67	.42
Lost Child	1,137	209.09	209.09	2.07	.15
Mascot	1,137	32.09	32.09	.69	.41
2-Way Interaction Setting X Sex					
Hero	1,137	10.87	10.87	.24	.63
Scapegoal	1,137	.00	.00	.00	1.00
Lost Child	1,137	359.52	359.52	3.56	.06
Mascot	1,137	21.53	21.53	.46	.50

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations
on the Family Role Inventory by Group

Group		Hero		Scapegoat		Lost Child		Mascot	
Incarcerated	N = 77	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Female	N = 44	40.80	6.61	47.80	10.14	49.43	9.56	44.61	7.02
Male	N = 33	38.13	7.42	49.97	8.78	50.94	11.85	43.10	7.53
Non-Incarcerated	N = 64								
Female	N = 31	42.33	7.42	49.09	8.12	45.26	11.10	44.79	5.73
Male	N = 33	40.79	5.42	51.24	9.47	50.94	11.85	44.85	6.93

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